Anne Carson

Genre Bender

Third Saturday Poesy Cafe

Tom Corrado

Thumbnail

In 2001, I drove my friend to Montreal for LASIK surgery. After the surgery, we visited McGill University's bookstore which had a display of a new book by a Canadian poet I had never heard of. The poet was Anne Carson. The book, *The Beauty of the Husband.* I thumbed through a copy and was seduced. By her intelligence, her words, her style, her inventiveness, her mystery, her irreverence, her magnetism, her originality, by the way she works her craft, by the way she makes poems. A trail-blazing genre-bender, Carson is an explorer of limits, an irritant of style, an indiscriminate seeker of information, a pusher of envelopes, a painter of volcanoes, a revivalist of Greek thought, a philosopher of desire, a pasticheur par excellence. Reading her is a white water challenge!

Life

- Born on June 21, 1950, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

- Studied Greek and Latin in high school.

- Studied Classics at the University of Toronto.

- Studied Greek metrics and Greek textual criticism for a year at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

- Worked briefly in graphic arts.

- Received BA, MA, and PhD from the University of Toronto.

- Taught at McGill, Calgary, Emory, Michigan, Princeton.

- Distinguished Poet-in-Residence at New York University, where once every year, she and her husband, Robert Currie, aka *The Randomizer*, teach a class on the Art of Collaboration, called *Egocircus.*

- An intensely private person, her book flaps typically state nothing more than *Anne Carson was born in Canada and teaches ancient Greek for a living.*

- In 2022, Carson and Currie were granted Icelandic citizenship.

- In an article in the August 2024 *London Review of Books*, Carson revealed that she had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Poetics

Anne Carson's poetics bend genres with an innovative, hybrid, experimental approach, blending classical and contemporary elements, merging poetry, essays, translations, drama, and prose narratives.

Her work frequently uses intertextuality to connect ancient myths with modern life, a voice that is both critical and confessional. As a classicist, she mixes ancient Greek/Latin literature with modern themes, exploring love, desire, grief, and the materiality of language. Her works frequently employ collage, visual elements, and fragmented narratives to engage readers in Lacan's *dismantling of wisdom.*

Stylistic Devices

Materiality and Form: Books like *Nox* (a poem in a box) and *Float* (a collection of chapbooks) emphasize that the physical, tactile form of the book is essential to the reading experience.

Desire and Absence: Drawing on her scholarship in ancient Greek literature, particularly Sappho, Carson explores eros as a *bittersweet* experience driven by the tension between pleasure and pain, presence and absence.

Fragmentation: Carson's work often uses fragmentation both thematically and structurally to mirror emotional brokenness and loss, and to emphasize the gaps in historical records. In her translation *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho,* she uses stark visual layout and brackets to highlight the missing parts of the original poems, making the absence a tangible part of the reading experience.

The Classical and the Modern: A trained classicist, Carson

interweaves ancient and contemporary strands, placing figures like Virginia Woolf and Thucydides in conversation or reimagining Greek myths in modern settings. This approach allows her to examine *eternal themes* like love, loss, and identity through a fresh, anachronistic lens.

Decreation and the Self: In works like *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera,* Carson explores the idea of *decreation,* borrowed from philosopher Simone Weil, as a sublime annihilation or displacement of the self to make way for the divine or spiritual. This post-confessional approach uses techniques like quotation and critical analysis to move the self from the center of the work.

Hybridity and Form: Carson challenges traditional genre boundaries, merging essays, poetry, prose, opera libretti, and screenplays into unique *verse narratives* or *short talks.* This reflects her belief that form should serve the subject matter in unexpected ways.

Wildly Constant: Carson's work often explores the tension between *wildness* (desire, fragmentation) and *constancy* (form, classical tradition).

Lyrical and Laconic Voice: Her writing is characterized by a precise, often laconic, voice that can be both erudite and intensely personal.

Translation as Trope: Translation is a master trope in her poetics, serving as a metaphor for the bridge between past and present, self and other, and the inherent difficulty of fully capturing original meaning.

Intertextuality: Carson layers her work with references to Shakespeare, Keats, Rimbaud, and others, creating a rich intertextual *conversation* across history and literature.

Comments

Hers:

Every sound we make is a bit of autobiography.

You write what you want to write in the way that it has to be.

Greek is one of those things that, when you do it, you realize it's the best experience in the world, there's no reason ever to stop. It's just some amazing combination of the kind of puzzle-solving that goes into crosswords and amazing literature. You think, well, they're nerds, they were born that way. But they're not just nerds, they're all kinds of people who stumble into this happy field of endeavor and stay there.

I am kind of a curmudgeonly person, so I don't gravitate to groups or traditions, which is probably just pretentious of me.

I don't like covering things with a lot of exegesis.

I tried writing a novel. Well, I had the aspiration but it just kept having too many words. When I get too many words, I don't feel that I'm saying anything. I'm just saying the words, not the thing. So I have to keep cutting it down, cutting it down, and it gets turned into verse. It was hopeless.

I think a poem, when it works, is an action of the mind captured on a page, and the reader, when he engages it, has to enter into that action. And so his mind repeats that action and travels again through the action, but it is a movement of yourself through a thought, through an activity of thinking, so by the time you get to the end you're different than you were at the beginning and you feel that difference.

The notion of spare time suggests . . . trafficking in the inessential. Why choose to be separate from the essential?

I have two desks, and I have an academic thing going at one desk and the other thing going on at the other desk, and do them at the same time. Sometimes I mix them, mix pages - like one time I wrote an academic article and gave it the same title as a poetic essay I was doing. It just gets all cross-fertilized. The boundaries people set are both unnecessary

and unhelpful.

I didn't write very much at all until I guess my twenties because I drew. I just drew pictures, and sometimes wrote on them when I was young, but mostly I was interested in drawing. I never did think of myself as a writer!

I don't know that I consider myself a writer yet. I know that I have to make things. And it's a convenient form we have in our culture, the book, in which you can make stuff, but it's becoming less and less satisfying. And I've never felt that it exhausts any idea I've had.

Men know almost nothing about desire, they think it has to do with sexual activity or can be discharged that way. But sex is a substitute, like money or language. Sometimes I just want to stop seeing.

Time isn't made of anything. It is an abstraction. Just a meaning that we impose
upon motion.

Sometimes I dream a sentence and write it down. It's usually nonsense, but sometimes it seems a key to another world.

I used to think when I was younger and writing that each idea had a certain shape and when I started to study Greek and I found the word "morphe" it was for me just the right word for that, unlike the word shape in English which falls a bit short morphe in Greek means the sort of plastic contours that an idea has inside your all your senses when you grasp it the first moment and it always seemed to me that a work should play out that same contour in its form. So I can't start writing something down til I get a sense of that, that morphe. And then it unfolds, I wouldn't say naturally, but it unfolds gropingly by keeping only to the contours of that form whatever it is.

Prowling the meanings of a word, prowling the history of a person, no use expecting a flood of light. Human words have no main switch. But all those little kidnaps in the dark. And then the luminous, big, shivering, discandied, unrepentant, barking web of them that hangs in your mind when you turn

back to the page you were trying to translate.

You doubt God? Well more to the point I credit God with the good sense to doubt me. What is mortality after all but divine doubt flashing over us? For an instant God suspends assent and poof! we disappear.

Novels institutionalize the ruse of eros. It becomes a narrative texture of sustained incongruence, emotional and cognitive. It permits the reader to stand in triangular relation to the characters in the story and reach into the text after the objects of their desire, sharing their longing but also detached from it, seeing their view of reality but also its mistakenness. It is almost like being in love.

It is the task of a lifetime. You can never know enough, never work enough, never use the infinitives and participles oddly enough, never impede the movement harshly enough, never leave the mind quickly enough.

Those nights lying alone are not discontinuous with this cold hectic dawn. It is who I am.

English is a bitch.

What is the holiness of conversation? It is to master death.

With writing, we're talking about the struggle to drag a thought over from the mush of the unconscious into some kind of grammar, syntax, human sense; every attempt means starting over with language. Starting over with accuracy. I mean, every thought starts over, so every expression of a thought has to do the same. Every accuracy has to be invented. . . . I feel I am blundering in concepts too fine for me.

When I began to be published, people got the idea that I should 'teach writing,' which I have no idea how to do and don't really believe in. So now and then I find myself engaged by a 'writing program' (as at NYU, Stanford) and have to bend my wits to deflect the official purpose.

I'm really trying to make people's minds move, you know,

which is not something they're naturally inclined to do. We have a kind of inertia, sitting and listening. But it's really important to get somehow into the mind and make it move somewhere it has never moved before. That happens partly because the material is mysterious or unknown but mostly because of the way you push the material around from word to word in a sentence. And it's that that I'm more interested in doing, generally, than mystifying by having unexpected content or bizarre forms. It's more like, given whatever material we're going to talk about, and we all know what it is, how can we move within it in a way we've never moved before, mentally? That seems like the most exciting thing to do with your head. I think it's a weakness to fall back into merely mystifying the audience, which anybody can do. You know, throw in a bit of Hegel. Who knows what that means? But to actually take a piece of Hegel and move it around in a way that shows you something about Hegel is a satisfying challenge.

Contradiction is the test of reality, as Simone Weil says.

I don't know how to sum up and I do think that the best thing you can do in that place of summing up is to blast it open somehow . . . with small means like swimming . . . but just to defuse the presumption that one can have thoughts alive in their mind, in a room, and then get a little nugget of summary of that and take it home and have it. I don't like that - having the thought. I like to be in the thought and then it goes away with the time.

Others:

Even now, in her 70s, she is still in a process of constant becoming. (Wilson)

Her voice is like no other writing in English today – she's the closest we have to our poetic mothers of linguistic invention - Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein. (Rabinowitz)

Reading her books is both an exhilarating and a bewildering experience. Carson takes risks, subverts literary conventions and plays havoc with our expectations. She is a wonder: an unconventional, often difficult poet with a huge following.

(Simic)

Though distinguished, Carson's academic training did not run a straight path. The fascination with classical literature which dominates her work began to take root in high school. There, a Latin instructor introduced her to the world and language of Ancient Greece and tutored the future poet privately. Enrolling at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, she left twice - at the end of her first and second years. Carson, disconcerted by curricular constraints (particularly by a required course on Milton), retired to the world of graphic arts for a short time. She did eventually return to the University of Toronto where she completed her B.A. in 1974, her M.A. in 1975 and her Ph.D. in 1981. (Wikipedia)

Carson is regarded by many critics - particularly in her home country of Canada - as one of the greatest English-language poets to emerge in the late twentieth century. Her works are experiments in genre, blurring the lines between verse and prose, fiction and nonfiction. As a classics scholar, Carson draws on her knowledge of ancient history and mythology in much of her poetry, making frequent allusions to classical literature, music, art, and philosophy. (enotes)

In 1980 she began teaching classics at Princeton University, serving as a professor there until 1987. Carson has also taught classical languages and literature at Emory University, the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, the Humanities Institute at the University of Michigan, and the University of California, Berkeley. (enotes)

A professor of the classics, with background in classical languages, comparative literature, anthropology, history, and commercial art, Carson blends ideas and themes from many fields in her writing. She frequently references, modernizes, and translates Greek mythology. Her books blend the forms of poetry, essay, prose, criticism, translation, dramatic dialogue, fiction, and non-fiction. (Wikipedia)

Carson's works of verse and prose are characterized by several unique formal and stylistic qualities. Most notably, Carson blurs traditional categories of genre, constructing

hybrids of the essay, the autobiography, the novel, the verse poem, and the prose poem. Carson's background as a classics scholar colors all of her writings, which feature frequent references to Greek mythology and such ancient poets, philosophers, and historians as Sappho, Plato, and Homer. She routinely renders elements of history and mythology in contemporary terms and modern settings, often conceptually closing the distance between the past and the present. Her verse places references to modern popular culture, such as film and television, side by side with references to ancient Greek culture. Her pastiche approach to genre, form, and subject matter, as well as the strong element of irony that pervades much of her work, have earned her the designation as a postmodern or post-structuralist writer, although the terms metaphysical, surrealist, and magical realist have also been applied to her work. (enotes)

Her books are like collages, a combination of memoir, poetry, dissertation and drama, held together each time by an overriding theme. The question of what formal category they fall into doesn't interest her. (Brockes)

Her critics accuse her of being willfully obscure and she agrees with them up to a point, although she says that it's a question of personality rather than affectation. (Brockes)

At the core of Anne Carson's work beats the pulse of hundreds of women's desire, filled, unfulfilled, reverberating from Sappho to Sontag, in lyric to film script, all clamoring to be heard, all trying to shush the noise of modernity to hear each other. (Lemon Hound)

The danger with Carson's writing is that it drifts into whimsy or nonsense. *It does fall apart a lot. It gets just too weird for anyone to care about reading, or else it gets diluted into a sort of parody of itself. Intuition is the only way to keep on the line between them. And also focusing back on to the first time the idea came into your head has some kind of pristine conviction that it gradually loses.* Carson returns to the actual piece of paper on which she wrote down the beginning of the idea, usually a coffee-stained back of an envelope. *Because there's something almost*

magically convincing about that piece of paper. The same words typed on a nice clean piece of paper wouldn't have whatever it is - fidelity, to your original thought. (Brockes)

Anne Carson seems to have been created by our collective unconscious. She is very model of the kind of poet for our times, her cross genre pollination, her ease with the classics, her ability to keep so many *desktops* open at once. She is a Pentium 17, while most of us are still at 4. (Lemon Hound)

In the abbreviated, free-associative mode that she instantly established as her trademark, any thought might set off any other thought, or even a demi-thought: a discussion of Sappho's understanding of erotic desire in the opening of Eros the Bittersweet, for instance, segues quickly into the most fleeting of allusions to Anna Karenina. The enclosing context of Greek myth is everywhere in evidence, but so are the writerly presences of Simone Weil, Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty, to name but a few. Freudian and Lacanian theory also put in an appearance, as does a passing observation on Sartre's understanding of the experience of viscosity. (Merkin)

Carson is one of the great pasticheurs, and her influences are diverse – Emily Dickinson is said to be a favorite, although I don't see much of her in the work, but there are traces of Gerard Manley Hopkins in her use of bricolage-like constructions and of Anne Sexton in the sudden dips into the fondly maternal (*Little soul, poor vague animal*) and in flashes of emotional clarity: *We are mortal, balanced on a day, now and then / it makes sense to say Save what you can.* Overall, one would wish for less archness, which too often gives the writing a brittle patina of self-regard, and I wonder when Carson will realize that not every performance has to be a bravura one. Sometimes, too, the images strain credulity - *He could fill structures of / threat with a light like the earliest olive oil* - and sometimes the writer seems lost in an enterprise of her own devising. (Merkin)

I don't think there has been a book since Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* that has advanced the art of poetry quite as radically as Anne Carson is in the process of doing. Although I can understand why Carson's peers might bristle

at the grandness of her ambition and squabble about her imperious disregard for even the laxest of forms, it seems to me that there is only one relevant question to be posed about her writing. What her fellow poets would do well to ask themselves is not whether what Carson is writing can or cannot be called poetry, but how has she succeeded in making it – whatever label you give it – so thrillingly new? (Merkin)

Anne Carson has somehow become a culture hero – the *anti-bourgeois* variety of icon that, as Susan Sontag once noted, appeals by being *repetitive, obsessive, and impolite.* (O'Rourkel)

The subjects that preoccupy Carson - sexuality, irony, the media - are trendy ones. So is her stable of reference - Gertrude Stein, Sigmund Freud, Antonin Artaud - and her approach: postmodern juxtapositions of the old and the new (*TV is hardhearted, like Lenin*), oblique hints at dark intimacies (*Show me yours / and I'll give you something good*) and Sapphic themes: She's not a lesbian, but *Autobiography of Red* sympathetically imagines the loneliness of having to cloak one's identity. (O'Rourkel)

[Carson's poetry] is much more daring and austere, even primitive, than any poetry merely propped up by postmodernist theory. It casts a cold eye on the wrinkled cloth of the human soul (a word she dares to use) and discerns a range of human maneuvers most of us never glimpse. It has a transparency whose levels of complexity are hard to parse. (O'Rourkel)

Here is a poet who seems to be an advocate of baring all. The manner is exposure and raw disclosure; the tone is clipped, detached, knowing. (O'Rourkel)

The Carson method involves a kind of mashup of old and new; she proceeds through juxtaposition rather than metaphor-making. What you get is the over-all action of the mind rather than the high-shine lacquer of the apt image. Although she is referred to as a poet, she writes in prose at least as often as she does in verse. Still, only poetry seems capacious enough to encompass her cut-up, sui-generis style.

She favors lines in which words that can double as nouns and adjectives bump against each other (*a solid unlit white sky*), or even meld into one word (*overtakelessness*), without the governing aid of punctuation, making reading into an act of translation, and restoring strangeness to language. She likes, too, to introduce narrative information flatly, almost as one might in a screenplay. (O'Rourke2)

She's drawn to themes of desire and privation (she titled her study of Paul Celan and the ancient Greek poet Simonides of Ceos *The Economy of the Unlost*), and the urge to get away from *self*. T. S. Eliot said that poetry required *an escape from personality*, and Carson seems to take that seriously, but with her it's a cleansing compulsion akin to an anorexic's or a saint's. *You can never know enough, never work enough, never use the infinitives and participles oddly enough, never impede the movement harshly enough, never leave the mind quickly enough*, she wrote in *Plainwater* (1995), a peculiar assortment of essays, *short talks*, and long poems with faux-scholarly introductions, the kind that might be written by someone steeped in Gertrude Stein and French theory. (O'Rourke2)

In many of her strongest pieces, such as *Just for the Thrill: An Essay on the Differences Between Women and Men* (a series of prose fragments which appeared in *Plainwater*), her speakers appear to be preoccupied by the troubling proximity between what they experience as the annihilating transport of sex and the visionary transport of the sublime. (O'Rourke2)

Michael Ondaatje, who recently gave a reading with her in Toronto, says, *When you're reading her work, you're taking in a huge range of intellect and wit and emotion, which are (sic) not usually found in the same person.* (Ratliff)

Indeed, Carson's entire modus operandi revolves around chance. She is an almost indiscriminate seeker of information; she loves particularities. Ordering dinner in a pan-Asian restaurant one night during my visit, she considers a fish dish, which has the name of the lake where the fish had been caught listed on the menu. *Where is that?* she asks. *It sounds like Africa.* When neither of us can place

the name of the obscure lake, she becomes disenchanted and orders noodles instead. (Rehak)

Carson is a classical scholar with the soul of a Romantic, and she writes with the passion of a master teacher, inciting, inflaming her students to experience the text with both heart and mind. (Pollock)

The idea of *spare time*, a quantity most of us lust after continuously, is for her an alien concept. . . . Unlike many poets, who teach only because they need a way to support their writing, Carson loves teaching classics and finds that it provides valuable inspiration for her poems. (Rehak)

Few contemporary poets elicit such powerful responses from readers and critics as Anne Carson. The *New York Times Book Review* calls her work "personal, necessary, and important," while *Publishers Weekly* says she is "nothing less than brilliant." Her poetry - enigmatic yet approachable, deeply personal yet universal in scope, mildly mutable yet always recognizable as her distinct voice - invests contemporary concerns with the epic resonance and power of the Greek classics that she has studied, taught, and translated for decades. (Amazon)

Albert Einstein credited his discovery of fundamental laws of the universe to his ability to ask the simple question, wrote Steven Marks in a Dictionary of Literary Biography piece. Much the same can be said of Anne Carson, who in her poetry and essays asks questions about gender, desire, anger, self, and language that allow the reader to see the world afresh. (poetryfoundation.org)

Originally she wanted to be an artist. (Brockes)

Books

The Gender of Sound (2025)

An expanded version of an earlier essay in which Carson, embracing the label of ethnographic naïf for her method of casting a wide net and mingling evidence from different periods of time and different forms of cultural expression,

discusses some of the historical meanings invested in sounds made by women, versus those made by men. *It is in large part according to the sounds people make that we judge them sane or insane, male or female, good, evil, trustworthy, depressive, marriageable, moribund, likely or unlikely to make war on us, little better than animals, inspired by God.*

Wrong Norma (2024)

According to Carson: *"Wrong Norma is a collection of writings about different things, like Joseph Conrad, Guantánamo, Flaubert, snow, poverty, Roget's Thesaurus, my Dad, Saturday night. The pieces are not linked. That's why I've called them 'wrong'."*

H of H Playbook (2021)

H of H Playbook is an explosion of thought, in drawings and language, about Herakles, a Greek tragedy by the 5th-century BCE poet Euripides. In myth Herakles returns home after years of making war to find he cannot adapt to a life of peacetime domesticity. He goes berserk and murders his whole family. He considers suicide, but due to the intervention of his friend Theseus, Herakles comes to believe he is not, after all, indelibly stained by his own crimes, nor is his life without value.

Norma Jeane Baker of Troy (2019)

Norma Jean Baker of Troy is a meditation in the form of a spoken and sung performance piece on the destabilizing and destructive power of beauty, drawing together Helen of Troy and Marilyn Monroe, twin avatars of female fascination separated by millennia but united in mythopoeic force. It debuted in New York City in 2019. The non-linear plot is loosely based upon the play Helen, written by Euripides in 412 BCE and superimposes Marilyn Monroe over the legendary figure of Helen of Troy.

Float (2016)

With *Float,* Carson goes further still: exploring myth and memory, beauty and loss, all the while playing with - and

pushing - the limits of language and form. Within this beautifully designed box, there are twelve individual booklets that can be read in any order: conjuring a mix of voices, time periods, and structures to explore what makes people, memories, and stories *maddeningly attractive* when observed in liminal space. One can begin with Carson puzzling through Proust on a frozen Icelandic plain, in the art-saturated enclaves of downtown New York City, or atop Mount Olympus as Zeus ponders his afterlife. There is a three-woman chorus of Gertrude Steins embodying an essay about *falling,* and an investigation of monogamy and marriage as Carson anticipates the perfect egg her husband is cooking for breakfast. Exquisite, heartbreaking, disarmingly funny, *Float* illuminates the uncanny magic that comes with letting go of boundaries. It is Carson's most intellectually electrifying and emotionally engaging book to date (Amazon).

The Albertine Workout (2014)

The Albertine Workout is a 38-page New Directions Poetry Pamphlet, containing 59 paragraphs, with appendices, summarizing Carson's vivid forensic dissection of Albertine, Marcel Proust's principal love interest in his magnificent approximately 4,200-page *À la recherche du temps perdu.* Its extraordinary arrangement of words is simply elegant, and a delight to read!

Nay Rather (2014)

Nay Rather is a union of two texts. The first, *Variations on the Right to Remain Silent*, is an essay on the stakes involved when translation happens and covers works ranging from Homer through Joan of Arc to Paul Celan. It also includes the author's seven translations of a poetic fragment from the Greek poet Ibykos. The second, *By Chance the Cycladic People*, is a poem about Cycladic culture in which the order of the lines has been determined by a random number generator.

Iphigenia Among the Taurians (translation, 2014)

Iphigenia among the Taurians is the latest in Carson's series

of translations of the plays of Euripides. Originally published as part of the third edition of Chicago's *Complete Greek Tragedies*, it is published here as a stand-alone volume for the first time. In Carson's stunning translation, Euripides's play - full of mistaken identities, dangerous misunderstandings, and unexpected interventions by gods and men - is as fierce and fresh as any contemporary drama. Carson has ccomplished one of the rarest feats oftranslation: maintaining fidelity to a writer's words even as she inflects them with her own unique poetic voice.

Red Doc> (2013)

Red Doc> is a sequel of sorts to *Autobiography of Red*, which was a sequel of sorts to a poem by the ancient Greek poet Stesichoros. In Greek myth, a monster named Geryon lived on a red island and tended a herd of coveted red cattle; slaying the monster and stealing the cattle was the tenth of the twelve labors of Herakles. The tale was set down by Hesiod and others almost 3,000 years ago. *Red Doc>*, then, is greater than the sum of its parts. This is Carson's obsession, and her gift: to make meaning from the fragments we get, which are also all we get – of time, of the past, of each other. It doesn't last, of course; the arrow of gravity, like the arrow of time, points in only one direction. Still, for a moment, she gets it all to hang together up there, the joy made keener by the coming fall.

Antigonick (2012)

Antigonick presents a new way of thinking about the book as a literary and artistic medium. A collaboration with illustrator and poet Bianca Stone, Carson's former student, and designer and Carson's husband Robert Currie, who is credited as assisting with the design of *Nox*, *Antigonick* is an unconventional translation of *Antigone*, Sophocles' tragedy about the willful, intractable girl who transgresses against her uncle the King of Thebes' royal decree by burying her dead brother, a political traitor, according to the divine rites. The text is hand-lettered by Carson in black and red ink, and the color illustrations (watercolor?) are printed on vellum so that they overlay the text. The visual motif of a spool of thread runs through

Stone's illustrations, and like the thread the images are placed so they can get tangled up with the text. It's a brave and interesting project, but one that, in spite of Carson's fiercely intelligent creative instincts, doesn't actually hold together. It doesn't fully open up the door to its source text for the reader. Instead, it demands prior knowledge of *Antigone* in order to really plumb the depths of the work. It's not really a translation - it's a re-imagining, what Carson's Canadian contemporary Erin Moure calls a "transcreation," with both text and images and the interplay between them transposing Sophocles' language and themes. The problem is that the work comes alive in spectacular ways only when you put it next to a more traditional translation, such as Robert Fagles' with notes by Bernard Knox. *Antigonick* strives to be a multi-dimensional artistic work, not a study of or a gloss on *Antigone*. Some critics have opined that Carson's scholarly impulse barricades textual meanings instead of providing a generous way in.

Nox (2010)

Anne Carson's haunting and beautiful *Nox* is a unique, illustrated, accordion-fold-out *book in a box. Nox* is an epitaph in the form of a book, a facsimile of a handmade book Anne Carson wrote and created after the death of her brother. The poem describes coming to terms with his loss through the lens of her translation of Poem 101 by Catullus *for his brother who died in the Troad. Nox* is a work of poetry, but, in addition to the poems, Carson pasted old letters, family photos, collages and sketches on pages.

An Oresteia (translation, 2009)

To those who would doubt the capacity of any 21st century poet to follow Ezra Pound's first commandment to 'make it new,' a constant, ever-jolting answer is provided by Anne Carson, poet, essayist, translator, professor of Greek. There is simply no such thing as an Anne Carson book that doesn't present us with something new under the sun. What we have here is, in response to a request by Brian Kulick, artistic director of New York City's Classic Stage company, to complete, as a trilogy a kind of Oresteia she'd already

started with a translation of Sophokles' *Elektra* in 1987 and Euripides' *Orestes* in 2006 . . . And wait until you read the new beginning of her all-star Greek tragedians' trilogy - the newly translated Agamemnon of Aiskhylos complete with such newly coined compound words as 'dayvisible' and 'dreamvisible' and 'manminded' and 'godaccomplished' – not to mention, in the intro, references to painter Francis Bacon (subject of a 2007 retrospective at the Albright-Knox Gallery) who 'makes his painting as Kassandra makes her prophecies, by removing a boundary in himself.' Anne Carson is not one to genuflect at boundaries. This is NEW. *(The Buffalo News)*

Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides (translation, 2006)

Euripides, the last of the three great tragedians of ancient Athens, reached the height of his renown during the disastrous Peloponnesian War, when democratic Athens was brought down by its own outsized ambitions. *Euripides*, the classicist Bernard Knox has written, *was born never to live in peace with himself and to prevent the rest of mankind from doing so.* His plays were shockers: he unmasked heroes, revealing them as foolish and savage, and he wrote about the powerless – women and children, slaves and barbarians – for whom tragedy was not so much exceptional as unending. Euripides' plays rarely won first prize in the great democratic competitions of ancient Athens, but their combustible mixture of realism and extremism fascinated audiences throughout the Greek world. In the last days of the Peloponnesian War, Athenian prisoners held captive in far-off Sicily were said to have won their freedom by reciting snatches of Euripides' latest tragedies. Four of those tragedies are presented here in new translations by the contemporary poet and classicist Anne Carson. They are *Herakles*, in which the hero swaggers home to destroy his own family; *Hekabe*, set after the Trojan War, in which Hektor's widow takes vengeance on her Greek captors; *Hippolytos*, about love and the horror of love; and the strange tragic-comedy fable *Alkestis*, which tells of a husband who arranges for his wife to die in his place.

Decreation (2005)

Simone Weil described "decreation" as "undoing the creature in us" - an undoing of self. In her first collection in five years, Anne Carson explores this idea with characteristic brilliance and a tantalizing range of reference, moving from Aphrodite to Antonioni, Demosthenes to Annie Dillard, Telemachos to Trotsky, and writing in forms as varied as opera libretto, screenplay, poem, oratorio, essay, shot list, and rapture. As she makes her way through these forms she slowly dismantles them, and in doing so seeks to move through the self, to its undoing.

If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho (translation, 2002)

Of the nine books of lyrics the ancient Greek poet Sappho is said to have composed, only one poem has survived complete. The rest are fragments. In this miraculous new translation, acclaimed poet and classicist Anne Carson presents all of Sappho's fragments, in Greek and in English, as if on the ragged scraps of papyrus that preserve them, inviting a thrill of discovery and conjecture that can be described only as electric - or, to use Sappho's words, as *thin fire . . . racing under skin.* By combining the ancient mysteries of Sappho with the contemporary wizardry of one of our most fearless and original poets, *If Not, Winter* provides a tantalizing window onto the genius of a woman whose lyric power spans millennia.

The Beauty of the Husband: A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos (2001)

The Beauty Of The Husband is an essay on Keats's idea that beauty is truth, and is also the story of a marriage. It is told in 29 tangos. A tango (like a marriage) is something you have to dance to the end. This clear-eyed, brutal, moving, darkly funny book tells a single story in an immediate, accessible voice - 29 *tangos* of narrative verse that take us vividly through erotic, painful, and heartbreaking scenes from a long-time marriage that falls apart.

Electra (translation, 2001)

Electra is a story of a savage though necessary act of vengeance, vividly depicting Electra's grief, anger, and

exultation. Carson's translation equals the original in ferocity of expression, and leaves intact the inarticulate cries of suffering and joy that fill the play.

Men in the Off Hours (2001)

A volume of Carson's writings - it's title is derived from a quote by Virginia Woolf - is in a variety of forms - short poems, epitaphs, eulogies, love poems, and essays in verse. A series of poems, under the collective title "TV Men," presents hypothetical television scripts featuring a cast of literary, historical, and mythical figures including Sappho, Antonin Artaud, Leo Tolstoy, Lazarus, Antigone, and Anna Akhmatova.

Economy of the Unlost (1999)

A dense and complicated series of essays on loss, absence, and death, which has little in common with Carson's previous works except for its primary method - juxtaposing the classical and the contemporary. Originally delivered as lectures in the Martin Classical Lectures series at Oberlin College, *Economy of the Unlost* places the fifth-century B.C. Greek poet Simonides in conversation with Paul Celan, a twentieth-century German poet who committed suicide.

Autobiography of Red (1998)

A stunning work that is both a novel and a poem, both an unconventional re-creation of an ancient Greek myth and a wholly original coming-of-age story set in the present: Geryon, a young boy who is also a winged red monster, reveals the volcanic terrain of his fragile, tormented soul in an autobiography he begins at the age of five. As he grows older, Geryon escapes his abusive brother and affectionate but ineffectual mother, finding solace behind the lens of his camera and in the arms of a young man named Herakles, a cavalier drifter who leaves him at the peak of infatuation. When Herakles reappears years later, Geryon confronts again the pain of his desire and embarks on a journey that will unleash his creative imagination to its fullest extent. By turns whimsical and haunting, erudite and accessible, richly layered and deceptively simple, Autobiography of Red is a profoundly moving portrait of an

artist coming to terms with the fantastic accident of who he is.

Glass, Irony and God (1995)

Anne Carson's poetry - characterized by various reviewers as *short talks*, *essays*, or *verse narratives* - combines the confessional and the critical in a voice all her own. Known as a remarkable classicist, Anne Carson weaves contemporary and ancient poetic strands with stunning style in *Glass, Irony and God*. This collection includes: *The Glass Essay*, a powerful poem about the end of a love affair, told in the context of Carson's reading of the Brontë sisters; *Book of Isaiah*, a poem evoking the deeply primitive feel of ancient Judaism; and *The Fall of Rome*, about her trip to *find* Rome and her struggle to overcome feelings of a terrible alienation there.

Plainwater: Essays and Poetry (1995)

This poetry and prose collection is a testament to the extraordinary imagination of Anne Carson, a writer described by Michael Ondaatje as "the most exciting poet writing in English today." Succinct and astonishingly beautiful, these pieces stretch the boundaries of language and literary form, while juxtaposing classical and modern traditions. Carson envisions a present-day interview with a seventh-century BC poet, and offers miniature lectures on topics as varied as orchids and Ovid. She imagines the muse of a fifteenth-century painter attending a phenomenology conference in Italy. She constructs verbal photographs of a series of mysterious towns, and takes us on a pilgrimage in pursuit of the elusive and intimate anthropology of water. Blending the rhythm and vivid metaphor of poetry with the discursive nature of the essay, the writings in *Plainwater* dazzle us with their invention and enlighten us with their erudition.

Short Talks (1992)

A collection of miniature essays, ranging in length from a single sentence to a paragraph, that reflect the formal qualities of prose poetry. These *Short Talks* – as Carson

labels them – cover such topics as the Mona Lisa, Vincent Van Gogh, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Plath, and Brigitte Bardot.

Eros the Bittersweet (1986)

A book about love as seen by the ancients, Eros is an exploration of the concept of "eros" in both classical philosophy and literature. Beginning with: *It was Sappho who first called eros 'bittersweet.' No one who has been in love disputes her. What does the word mean?,* Carson examines her subject from numerous points of view and styles, transcending the constraints of the scholarly exercise for an evocative and lyrical meditation in the tradition of William Carlos William's Spring and All and William H. Gass's *On Being Blue.* Epigrammatic, witty, ironic, and endlessly interesting, Eros is an utterly original book by an author whose acclaim has been steadily growing since the book was first published in 1986 by Johns Hopkins.

Selected Awards

1996 Lannan Literary Award
1997 Pushcart Prize
1998 Guggenheim Fellowship
1998 QSPELL Poetry Award
2000 MacArthur Fellowship
2001 Griffin Poetry Prize for *Men in the Off Hours*
2001 T. S. Eliot Prize for *The Beauty of the Husband*
2010 PEN Award for *Poetry in Translation*
2012 Honorary degree from the University of Toronto (2012)
2014 Folio Prize for *Red Doc>*
2014 Griffin Poetry Prize (Canada) for *Red Doc>*
2016: Blue Metropolis International Literary Grand Prize for lifetime achievement
2019: Manuel Acuña International Poetry Prize
2020: Princess of Asturias Award for Literature
2020: Governor General's Literary Award for *Norma Jeane Baker of Troy*
2021: PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature
2023 University of Iceland's Vidgis Prize
2025: Paris Review Hadada Prize for lifetime achievement

Takeaway

There is an impoliteness to the spellbinding magic of poetry superstar Anne Carson that appeals to readers as she blends classical and contemporary elements merging poetry, essays, translations, drama, and prose narratives to bend genres with wordwork about gender, desire, anger, language, and self, offering new ways of looking at the world. She is hands-down amazing!

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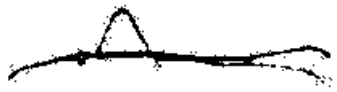

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